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## THE FEEBLE-MINDED BLIND.

By HENRY J. WILSON.

THE subject on which I have been asked to write a paper is "The Feeble-minded Blind." The question of the best treatment for the ordinary feeble-minded person is in itself a difficult one, but when blindness is superadded, the difficulties are intensified.

The first question to be asked is what is meant by the two words "feeble-minded" and "blind." They have to be defined because they are very elastic and comprehensive terms. The former one covers the ground between those who, on the one hand, are on the verge of idiocy, and, on the other hand, are the ordinary dullards, who are only stupid and slow of comprehension. The term "blind" includes not only those who are totally blind, but also those who are highly myopic or of defective vision from some other cause. As, however, both these words have been defined by Act of Parliament, it is well to adopt such definitions. In the Elementary Education (Defective Children) Act, 1899, 62 and 63 Vict. cap. 32, the word "defective," which includes, and is therefore practically synonymous with, "feeble-minded," applies to "children not being imbecile, and not being merely dull or backward, who, by reason of mental or physical defects, are incapable of receiving proper benefit from the instruction in the ordinary public elementary schools, but are not incapable, by reason of such defect, of receiving benefit in special classes or schools." In the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act, 1893, 56 and 57 Vict. cap. 42, the word "blind" applies to those who are "too blind to read the ordinary school-books used by children."

*The Effect of the Feeble-minded on Normal Children.*—As far as can be ascertained from inquiries, the feeble-minded blind children are not very numerous, but at the same time they are a disturbing element in the ordinary schools for the blind when they are being educated there. It has been estimated that there are about 170 in England and Wales, but this estimate seems considerably under the mark. At the present time there are about twenty-six (twenty boys and six girls) who are feeble-minded out of a total of 286 blind children on the rolls of the London County Council's special schools, or, say, 9 per cent. Mr. Edward E. Allen, superintendent of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Blind, stated last year that there were in the United States of America probably about 2000 feeble-minded blind children, or, say, 17 per cent. Mentally-afflicted children are found in most of the schools for the blind, either on probation, or as ordinary pupils, and as a rule, they are taught in the same classes with the ordinary blind pupils. Whilst there are a few superintendents of schools for the blind who contend that the presence of the feeble-minded brings out the better nature of ordinary children by teaching them to help and sympathise with those who are less fortunate than themselves, still there is a preponderance of opinion that the feeble-minded blind act prejudicially on the others, and should receive special treatment in a separate institution. They require so much individual teaching and study that the normal children must of necessity often be

neglected, and suffer thereby. The ordinary children are prone to repeat and imitate the silly and often abusive and vulgar expressions of the others, and thus the whole moral tone of the school is affected and the standard of work lowered. Classes are likewise disturbed and attention constantly arrested by the eccentricities and irritability expressed in screams and otherwise by mentally-defective children, many of whom are either mischievous and destructive, or vicious, quarrelsome and spiteful, addicted to biting and dirty habits, or irresponsible to all demands for obedience and discipline. It must always be remembered that children are intensely imitative and susceptible to the influences of their environment, and that the blind are no exception, even possibly more impressionable.

*Treatment of Feeble-minded Blind Children*—As previously stated, there seems to be a great need for the creation of separate residential schools where the feeble-minded can receive individual attention, and where there is special treatment by teachers specially trained for this specific purpose. It is not so much what the teacher actually teaches as the impressions tactfully made in work and play, which act as a stimulus to the child's mental betterment. The great advantage of such schools is clearly shown by the excellent results of the careful and thoughtful training given in the residential school for mentally defective blind boys under the London County Council at Stormont House, to which reference will be made later on. As, however, it is probable that there would not be a sufficient number of defective blind in any town except London to warrant the expense of opening a special school, it would be an economic advantage if the local educational authorities would combine (as they already do for the blind and deaf at Leeds and Stoke-on-Trent) and establish joint special schools in some healthy positions where defective blind children could be sent from all parts of the country. It is, however, most essential, in order to avoid any possible mistake, that children should not be sent to a special school until they have been medically examined and thoroughly tested at an ordinary school for blind children, and can be certified by a qualified medical practitioner, and also by the head-teacher of the school, as unsuitable for retention in the normal school. Examination of the defective children in the special schools should also be held periodically in order to ascertain whether any have sufficiently improved to be retransferred to the ordinary school.

The treatment of the feeble-minded must of necessity depend in many cases on the cause of the infirmity. For instance, those who have become defective from lack of proper nourishment—and there are not a few—can often be much improved by proper food, fresh air and firm discipline, although from insufficiency of brain power they may have lost physical control and contracted bad and filthy habits. It has been found in many, if not in most cases, that mental improvement follows when the child has received simple objective teaching. In fact it seems as if the germ of improvement lies in the primary sense of touch, and that by special attention in this direction at first the mental and physical powers gradually develop.

Again, constant watchfulness, patience and perseverance are essential characteristics in the special teacher, because some defectives develop slowly, and others with unexpected and startling suddenness. Mr. W. H. Illingworth, Superintendent of Henshaw's Blind Asylum, who has had con-





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siderable experience in the education of the defective blind, has written me that "the mentally defective at six years of age may remain apparently in the same condition and make absolutely no apparent progress intellectually for years, and then at the age of thirteen or fourteen suddenly emerge, as it were, from a cloud and learn well, though slowly." Mr. Illingworth has kindly favoured me with the following particulars of a most remarkable case of a boy who was brought to him at the age of six. The lad was always happy when jingling a bunch of keys, but he could not talk, was dirty in his habits, and his intellect was of such a low order that it was deemed advisable to remove him to an asylum for imbeciles. When the boy was fourteen years of age his father consulted Mr. Illingworth again, who found that the lad had improved so much at the asylum that he could read and write and answer questions on most subjects rationally.

Subsequently he learned to play the violin, and his progress in this art was marked by distinct improvement in general intelligence. The most remarkable point is the extraordinary musical faculty which developed. He possesses the gift of absolute pitch in a marvellous degree, inasmuch as he can differentiate between the actual qualities of notes. That is to say, suppose a pianoforte in one room be tuned exactly and precisely half a tone lower than another pianoforte, so that the note F on the former shall be of the same pitch as E on the latter, this boy will make no mistake in naming notes struck on either piano. Further, if a person sitting at a piano, tuned high or low pitch, strikes as many keys as he can, let it be the finest chord or most ear-splitting discord, this boy will name every note struck without the smallest slip or error. Mr. Illingworth has reason to hope that the lad may become self-supporting as a pianoforte-tuner, and cites this case as an example of the value of preliminary training in a special school.

It is much to be regretted that many cases of feeble-mindedness amongst the blind are caused by the parents not knowing how to treat their blind children, and by regarding them as being, and always likely to be, useless members of society. On that account they are often kept in bed, or cooped up indoors, so as to be out of harm's way, and receive neither education nor bodily exercise unless they are fortunately unearthed by the local school attendance officer. No wonder then that when these children go to school their intellects are dulled, their strength of body enfeebled, and their minds undeveloped, and that for a time they are apparently, and for all practical purposes, feeble-minded. These and similar cases can only be dealt with in a special school, where the result of constant attention, good food, regular hours and healthy outdoor exercise will be the means of brightening their lives, and where they will be rendered happier by some employment which brings into play both the mind and fingers. The instruction necessary for teaching a trade has to be adapted to the capacity of the child, and thus many can be taught useful handicrafts, which in later years may be of material assistance in defraying the cost of maintenance in a home. Children are far happier and healthier, and more likely to improve in physique, in a residential school than at their own homes, where they do not receive the necessary care and supervision, and are often sadly neglected, or in the workhouse.

*Stormont House School for Mentally Defective Blind Boys.*—As the only effort to deal with this class of children in a systematic and practical manner is the most successful one at Stormont House School under the

London County Council, and as no account of feeble-minded blind children would be complete without reference to this unique school, I venture to give a short account of a visit paid there this summer. The school stands in a high, open situation in the north-east of London, and the air there was in marked contrast to that of the more crowded and central part from which I came. This fact, together with the delightful house and garden that constitute the school premises, must exercise great influence for improvement in the health and general physique of the children. Stormont House accommodates twenty residential and ten day scholars, and was opened on June 11, 1904. Miss Bryan, the head-mistress, and Mrs. Grimmett, the teacher, discharge their difficult duty with extraordinary tact, resourcefulness and intelligence. Recognising that to endeavour to educate such children on any fixed system must end only in failure, they deal with each case individually in the manner best calculated to meet its idiosyncrasy and to awaken the dormant faculty. My first visit to this school was made in January, 1905, and on my second visit on May 15th of this year, I found a remarkable change in the pupils. Instead of the dull, heavy demeanour, the uninterested look, the purposeless movement of the fingers, and the too often heard fretful wailing voice, the children had almost without exception become orderly, obedient, and, compared with what they were before, intelligent. In a word, where all was dull and irresponsible before, there was now shown an interest and a comprehension perfectly marvellous to one like myself who had seen the unpromising beginning and was cognisant of the comparatively short time in which this wonderful change had been worked. Everything possible is done to awaken the children's interest in the common things of life—the daily round of lessons, play in the garden or indoors, the objects they can learn by touch—and the almost universal change of expression from dull vacancy to a look of happiness and contentment is sufficient witness to the efficacy of the training. The most unobservant person could not fail at once to perceive the "new boy," and the marked contrast between him and the children upon whom the loving care of the teachers has had time to take effect. Once a year the children are taken to the Zoological Gardens, and great is the excitement and keen the enjoyment of this excursion, questions about the animals being quite sufficiently numerous and searching to test severely the knowledge of natural history of their teachers. When the children return home after their visit it is always a source of great amusement to them to attempt to imitate the various sounds they have heard made by the animals and birds. Simple lectures on such apparently difficult subjects as electricity, railways, etc., are also given the children, and on testing their remembrance of one or two of these lectures, I was astonished at the memory and understanding shown in the answers received. A weekly motto is given them which they repeat every morning for a week, such as "Be always kind and true, as you would have others be to you," "Try to be something in this world, and you will be something," etc., and this leaven dropped daily into the darkened mind must of itself work for good. There is more manual work than in the ordinary school, and the children are taught knitting, both by hand and on frames, chair-caning, basket and *macramé* work. They also make wool mats and little wooden trays, and are taught clay-modelling and beadwork, some of the beads being the same size as Braille dots, so as to accustom the touch to Braille





reading. Stories are told or read by the teachers in very simple language, and then they have to be retold by the children in their own language. In this way it can be ascertained how much has been understood. At first these stories were not appreciated, and there was lack of concentration, but now at least sixteen out of the twenty children listen most attentively to them, Kipling's "Jungle Tales" being special favourites. Games of the simplest character have been organised, as they bring all parts of the body into motion and require a certain amount of thought. They not only tend to get rid of the lack of movement and various peculiarities, and inculcate the habit of self-reliance and responsibility, but they are also of an educational value in encouraging order, promptitude, obedience, kindliness and a sense of honour.

Twenty-eight boys have attended this school, of whom eight have left — four for ordinary schools for the blind, one is selling tea and boot-polish, and earning on an average six shillings a week, one went to an epileptic home, and two to Darenth Asylum. Sixteen of the boys now at school are in a stage of development, whilst the remaining four show no sign of improvement at present. The extremely dirty habits to which these children are addicted through bad or neglectful home training, lack of energy or physical weakness, have in each case been corrected and overcome by firmness, by regular and careful diet in cases where weakness is shown, and by fresh air, exercise and gymnastics.

*Provision for those above the age of sixteen years.*—It is probable that these afflicted ones are at the present time either in work-houses where they are subject to the sneers and jeers of other inmates, or with their parents, and subject to little or no control. It seems, therefore, advisable, both in the interest of the feeble-minded themselves and of the public, that special provision should be made for the adults, and that there should be no hiatus between the treatment of the child and of the adult, so as to allow of any leakage, but that the two treatments should be connected and form one complete and compulsory system for the improvement and protection of the feeble-minded blind throughout their lives. This might be done by the State, the county and borough councils, the guardians of the poor, or private philanthropy, establishing residential institutions on the cottage-home or block system in central healthy positions. The children could then be drafted straight to the homes, where they could carry on the trades they had learnt at school, and the still necessary care and firm treatment would be continued. It is most important that the adults should be kept under restraint, because of their immoral tendencies, the men and women being housed so that there can be no possibility of intercommunication. In the homes they should be under constant medical and other supervision, should be allowed plenty of exercise in the fresh air, and should be encouraged to take part in work adapted to their respective capacities and tastes, in order to keep their minds healthily employed, and prevent time hanging heavily on their hands, so certain to have a degrading and demoralising effect on them. There should be workshops attached to the homes, with a supply of the necessary tools and materials for the use of the more capable inmates; others might profitably be employed in gardening and farming.

To sum up in brief :—

1. Feeble-minded blind children should be trained by themselves in special schools by specially trained teachers.

2. From the schools they should be drafted direct to homes provided for them.
3. The adults should be confined in homes and given constant exercise and employment.
4. There should be frequent medical inspection.

Mr. BISHOP HARMAN (London) complimented Mr. Wilson on the interest and enthusiasm he had brought to a most depressing subject. Stormont House School he knew well, and all its inmates. These children were the poorest of poor material; exceptionally one was raised to something like a useful child, but the majority could only act under constant direction. He looked upon such a school as a sorting-house only. As a school, it would not justify its heavy cost; as a place of elimination, it did. Certainly all those who were found hopelessly defective should be withdrawn from circulation for their own and the country's good. Some had suggested sterilisation. There was much to be said for it, but few who would dare undertake it; the liability to a bad reaction on the healthy was too great. But they should be housed, fed, clothed and controlled in the simplest and most economical manner. There was only a certain amount of money to go round on matters of education, and the best material should get the most of it, so that it might be as reproductive as possible.

The Rev. ST. CLARE HILL (Leatherhead) stated that one case which had been under instruction at Stormont House was now in the school at Leatherhead receiving training in a trade, and that, given favourable conditions, there was every reason to hope that he would eventually earn at least a contribution to his livelihood.

He felt that money expended on special schools was well spent, and that much had been done if only a small proportion became able to take their places as ordinary members of society.

He wished to say how entirely he agreed with the reader of the paper as to the absolute necessity for the continuance of the care of the feeble-minded blind after school age; and since the majority of such cases must eventually become chargeable to the guardians, could not those guardians be induced to provide a special home instead of permitting these defenceless blind to live out a miserable existence in the workhouse.

Such a home would then be, not a new charitable institution, but one supported by the various boards of guardians, and so the best results for money expended would be obtained.

Would the reader inform us as to the source of his figures stating the number of blind persons in England and Wales? This is important, since we are informed that the census is an unreliable source in this particular.

Those interested in blind education are desirous of obtaining a workable definition, and, for all practical purposes, it is found that the following is effective: "A child shall be deemed blind when the eyesight is so defective as to render him incapable of being educated by the ordinary methods adopted in a public elementary school." The reader stated that "there are 25,317 blind people in England and Wales; but how many are there with defective eyesight? At least half a million." What proportion of this latter number cannot see sufficiently to be educated in a public elementary school? One word in reference to the last paragraph of the paper. Can any suggest a method of carrying out the idea of preventing marriage among those who are suffering from hereditary blindness?

Mr. B. P. JONES (London): Mr. Wilson has dealt in an able manner with a most difficult class of children—mentally defective blind. In London we found it impossible to deal with this class adequately in the ordinary schools for the blind. Some four years ago a home at Stormont House was opened as an experiment. Here they receive individual attention, and particular care is given to diet, physical and manual training, thus making way for mental instruction. A few improve sufficiently to return to the ordinary blind school, and all benefit considerably by the special training given; but with legislation as it now is, the efforts made seem futile, because



at the age of sixteen they are, as it were, thrown upon their own resources and miserably fail. What is sadly needed is legislation to empower the continuance of their training, and a home to shelter them the rest of their lives. Here they would at least help to provide towards their living and spend a happier life.

## DEFECTIVE ARTICULATION AND ITS PREVENTION.

By the late WILLIAM VAN PRAAGH.

UNFORTUNATELY the question of defective speech has not met hitherto with the attention it deserves. Speech, that splendid gift which puts the human being above every other creature in the scheme of creation, surely deserves the greatest care we can possibly give to it, as, in the words of Goldsmith, "Speech was given to man whereby to communicate his mind," and Tennyson has said, "Sweet is every sound—sweeter thy voice."

I will now proceed to treat the matter as affecting the normal as well as the abnormal individual, starting with those whose organs are perfectly normal, but who, through bad teaching and careless training, are possessed of articulation which, in many instances, is perfectly inaudible, and in others quite faulty. Referring not alone to the uneducated classes of society, but more particularly to the middle and upper classes, it appears that during the school years teachers do not devote sufficient time, energy, and practice to the development of their pupils' vocal organs.

It is rare to meet people who really articulate properly; proper articulation being neglected in the nursery, the elementary and secondary school, and so on through all the phases of life. Speech, when perfect, is, without doubt, an immense aid to the success of barristers and actors, who depend so much upon their purity of enunciation (their clear articulation), and yet how often do we not find both clergymen and barristers whose words are almost inaudible, and also public speakers, singers, and others who have but little control over their voices.

Our little children, gifted with all their facilities, often speak indistinctly, their indistinct utterance being caused by the mismanagement of their vocal organs.

Where lies the fault? and where is the remedy? Proper respiration should be taught not only in infant schools and the ordinary elementary day-schools, but also in every college and university.

The benefits to be derived from proper training in this direction cannot be overrated. Were this training adopted in our schools, theological colleges and universities, as a general rule clergymen's sore throat would be an unheard-of complaint, and public-speakers and singers would not suffer from the breakdowns or loss of the voice. More attention should therefore be paid to voice management and voice production in our schools, both public and private. Proper lessons in speaking should be given to all children; they should be taught how to breathe, how to



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